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Jesus' Quotation of Psalm 82:6 in John 10:34: A Different View of John's Theological Strategy

0. Introduction

Jesus' quotation of Psalm 82:6 in John 10:34 has been closely considered by New Testament scholars. The view that Psalm 82:6 refers to human beings as gods (*elohim*) is axiomatic in these treatments. By way of example, in his JBL article on the quotation, Jerome Neyrey begins with this assertion: "Biblical texts that called mortals 'gods' attracted attention from commentators and became the focus of ingenious interpretations and exegetical principles. This is certainly true of Psa 82:6."[1] I've read many discussions that presume this "mortal view" for Psalm 82:6 and bring that understanding to John 10, but I have always been left with three nagging points of dissatisfaction with the approach.

First, how is it a coherent defense of John's well-known high Christology by essentially having Jesus use Psalm 82:6 to say, in effect, that he can call himself the son of God when every other Jew can, too? The mortal view does nothing to advance John's strategic goal of portraying Jesus as the incarnate Logos and the unique (*monogenes*) son of God. In simplest terms, it has John casting Jesus as another mortal, for Jesus simply applies a verse to himself in the manner other mortals can do.

Second, how does the mortal view coherently explain the reaction of the Jewish audience in John's story? They call for his arrest (10:39), on the heels of picking up stones to stone him in 10:30. If Jesus is citing a text that all of them could just as well cite on their own behalf for being sons of God, why would Jesus' use of it elicit such a response?

My third point of dissatisfaction is more personal since my field is Hebrew Bible. The mortal interpretation of Psalm 82:6 would be utterly foreign to a Hebrew Bible scholar whose focus is Israelite religion. I'm not the first to point this out.[2] In 1960 J. A. Emerton, a Semitist whose focus was Israelite and Canaanite religion, argued against the mortal view in favor of the view that the gods of Psalm 82 were divine beings. Emerton's arguments did not gain acceptance, and even though I am sympathetic to his effort, I also have misgivings with his discussion. I believe the divine

[1] Jerome H. Neyrey, "'I said, You are Gods': Psalm 82:6 and John 10," *JBL* 108:4 (1989): 647.

[2] J. A. Emerton, "Some New Testament Notes," *JTS* 11 (1960): 329-332.

beings view can be argued in a different way, hopefully more coherently. My goal today is to present that alternative.

1. Psalm 82 and Israelite Religion

Israelite religion had an assembly of heavenly host under the authority of Yahweh. This assembly has very close affinities to the pantheons of ancient Near East, particularly in Canaanite religion. The most telling example is the literature from Ras Shamra (Ugarit), discovered in the late 1920s. As a Semitic language, Ugaritic is closely related to biblical Hebrew, sharing a good deal of vocabulary, as well as morphological and syntactical features. Upon their decipherment, many of the Ugaritic tablets were found to contain words and phrases describing a council of gods that are conceptually and linguistically parallel to the Hebrew Bible. The Ugaritic divine council was led by El, the same word used in the Hebrew Bible for deity and as the proper name for the God of Israel (e.g., Is 40:18; 43:12). There are explicit references to a council or assembly of El, in some cases overlapping word-for-word with those in the Hebrew Bible.[3]

Psalm 82:1 is perhaps the best example, as it employs the expression *ʿdt ʾil(m)* (Hebrew: עֲדַת־אֵל) for the council, along with a transparent reference to gods under the authority of Israel's God: "God (אֱלֹהִים) stands in the council of El/the divine council (עֲדַת־אֵל); among the gods (אֱלֹהִים) he passes judgment." The second occurrence of אֱלֹהִים must be semantically plural due to the preposition "in the midst of." These gods are being judged for their corrupt administration of the nations of the earth, having been granted that authority at the division of the nations at Babel according to Deut 32:8-9 (LXX, DSS).[4] This plurality cannot be explained as human beings. A parallel passage, Psalm 89:5-7 [6-8], places the God of Israel "in the assembly of the holy ones" (קְדֹשִׁים בְּקְהַל) and then asks "For who in the clouds (בַּשַּׁחַק) can be compared to Yahweh? Who is like Yahweh among the sons of God (בְּנֵי אֵלִים), a god greatly feared in the council of the holy ones (בְּסוֹד־קְדֹשִׁים)?" The divine council is in the heavens, not on earth where the Jewish judges are. Additionally, there is no text in the Hebrew Bible that has a council of human Israelite judges who are assigned to judge the nations of the earth. Consequently, the Israelite religious backdrop of Psalm 82, internal logical consistency,

[3] These include: *pḫr ʾilm* ("the assembly of El/ the gods"; *KTU* 1.47:29, 1.118:28, 1.148:9); *pḫr bn ʾilm* ("the assembly of the sons of El/ the gods"; *KTU* 1.4.III:14); *mpḫrt bn ʾilm* ("the assembly of the sons of El"; *KTU* 1.65:3; cf. 1.40:25, 42); and *ʿdt ʾilm* ("assembly of El / the gods"; *KTU* 1.15.II: 7, 11); Parker; Cooke.

[4] Heiser, Deut 32:8 and sons of God.

and explicit ancient Near Eastern parallels all converge to eliminate a "mortal" view of the gods of Psalm 82.

Another element of the Israelite divine council is that, at times, the lord of the council, the God of Israel, appeared in human form, creating a dyadic or binitarian co-regent structure to the council. This was a central focus of my dissertation under Michael Fox. The Ugaritic council also had such a structure, with El and Baal. The roles of those two deities are fused in Israel's unique deity, Yahweh, but Yahweh at times would be present on earth in human form. The most important of these manifestations for our purposes is the Angel of Yahweh who is specifically distinguished as having the "Name" of Yahweh in him and charged with leading Israel into the Promised Land (Exod 23:20-23). Like today, the "Name" (*ha-shem*) is a circumlocution for Yahweh himself. That the Angel fulfilled this task is affirmed in Judges 2:1-3, but in Deut 4:37 it is the "Presence" of Yahweh who led the people to Canaan from Egypt. The Name and the Presence are thus co-identified, and Israelite religion includes the notion of the embodied presence of Yahweh, lord of Israel's divine council. This co-regency of essentially two Yahwehs (one invisible, the other visible) is the Israelite backdrop for later Judaism's two powers in heaven. Since the co-regent second Yahweh came in human form, once Israel had a human Davidic king, co-ruler of the Israelites with Yahweh, the language of co-regent deity (Psalms 2, 45, 110) was also used of the human king. The Davidic king was not a god, but in rulership was the fully human co-regent of Yahweh's people. This language, however, was never democratized to all Israelites.[5] Every Jew was not a king and did not bear this description. These elements of Israelite religion will be crucial for the alternative proposal I will offer.

2. Prior Interpretations of John's Use of Psalm 82:6

2.1. Variations of the Mortal View

The mortal view options have been succinctly summarized in articles by Ackerman (1966), Hanson (1967), Neyrey (1989), and in the second edition of Beasley-Murray's Word Biblical Commentary on John.[6] They are as follows:

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[5] For a discussion of Israelite kingship as it relates to Christology, see Timo Eskola, *Messiah and Throne: Jewish Merkabah Mysticism and Early Christian Exaltation Discourse* (Mohr-Siebeck, 2001).

[6] James Ackerman, "The Rabbinic Interpretation of Psalm 82 and the Gospel of John," *HTR* 59 (1966) 186-91; Anthony Hanson, "John's Citation of Psalm LXXXII Reconsidered," NTS 13 (1966-1967): 363-367; Neyrey, "Psalm 82:6 and John 10," 647-649; George R. Beasley-Murray, vol. 36, *Word Biblical Commentary: John* (Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 176.

2.1.1. Psalm 82:6 has Israel's Judges in View

According to this view, it is the judges of Israel who fail to maintain justice in their courts that are the reference of the corrupt gods in Psalm 82:1-4. Supposedly, these judges are called "gods" by virtue of their appointment by God to judge according to divine law in his place. The Midrash on Ps 82 comments on verse 1, "These words are to be considered in the light of Moses' charge to the judges of Israel."[7]

Among the significant problems for this view is the fact that nowhere in the Hebrew Bible are the judges appointed by Moses called *elohim*. But that idea is derived from three passages. We'll briefly consider them in order:

> Exod 22:6-8 [Eng., 22:7-9]
>
> 6 When a man gives money or goods to another for safekeeping, and they are stolen from the man's house—if the thief is caught, he shall pay double; 7 if the thief is not caught, the owner of the house shall come near (נקרב) to God (האלהים) that he has not laid hands on the other's property. 8 In all charges of misappropriation—pertaining to an ox, an ass, a sheep, a garment, or any other loss, whereof one party alleges, "This is it"—the case of both parties shall come before God (האלהים): he whom God (אלהים) declares guilty (יַרְשִׁיעֻן) shall pay double to the other.[8]

Scholars who take the mortal view of Psalm 82 assume that אלהים and האלהים in Exod 22:6-8 are human beings (the elder-judges of Israel) and take the results of that assumption to argue that Psalm 82 is describing Israelite judges, not gods in a divine pantheon as scholars of Israelite religion would insist. The plural predicate in Exod 22:8 (יַרְשִׁיעֻן) allegedly supports this view, for surely the passage speaks of Israel's judges rendering decisions for the people. There are several problems with this use of the passage.

First, it is worth noting that these judges (if we presume for the moment that האלהים and אלהים are plural and referring to people) are rendering decisions for the nation of Israel – not the nations of the world as is the case in Psalm 82 and Deut 32. This contextual disconnect alone raises suspicions

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[7] W. G. Braude, Yale Judaica Series 13; see also Sanh. 6b–7a; Soṭa 47b; Tg. *Ps.-J.*

[8] *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985). The *Tanakh* translation follows the Hebrew versification.

about the merits of the use of the passage. The contextual incongruence aside, the argument here actually depends on whether אלהים and האלהים in verse 8 is to be taken as singular or plural, and whether it in fact refers to human beings.

Behind the assumption that אלהים and האלהים in Exod 22:8 are to be understood as semantically plural human beings is the earlier story in Exodus, where Moses appointed judges at the suggestion of his father-in-law, Jethro. This account is found in Exod 18:13-24. Note the occurrences of אלהים and האלהים carefully:

> Exod 18:13-24
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> 13 The next day, Moses sat as magistrate among the people, while the people stood about Moses from morning until evening. 14 But when Moses' father-in-law saw how much he had to do for the people, he said, "What is this thing that you are doing to the people? Why do you act alone, while all the people stand about you from morning until evening?" 15 Moses replied to his father-in-law, "It is because the people come to me to inquire of God (אלהים). 16 When they have a dispute, it comes before me, and I decide between one person and another, and I make known the laws and teachings of God." 17 But Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing you are doing is not right; 18 you will surely wear yourself out, and these people as well. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. 19 Now listen to me. I will give you counsel, and God (אלהים) be with you! You represent the people before God (האלהים): you bring the disputes before God (האלהים), 20 and enjoin upon them the laws and the teachings, and make known to them the way they are to go and the practices they are to follow. 21 You shall also seek out from among all the people capable men who fear God, trustworthy men who spurn ill-gotten gain. Set these over them as chiefs of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens, and 22 let them judge the people at all times. Have them bring every major dispute to you, but let them decide every minor dispute themselves. Make it easier for yourself by letting them share the burden with you. 23 If you do this—and God so commands you—you will be able to bear up; and all these people too will go home unwearied." 24 Moses heeded his father-in-law and did just as he had said.

Taken at face value, there is nothing in Exodus 18 that compels us to understand אלהים or האלהים as semantically plural, something that is essential for the notion that the men appointed in the episode are a convenient explanation for the אלהים and האלהים of both Exod 22:8 and Psa 82. Each occurrence of אלהים or האלהים in this passage can quite readily refer to the singular God of Israel. And the same is true of Exodus 22. There is nothing in either passage that compels a plural translation. A singular translation referring to God himself makes for a clear reading. Without compelling evidence for a plural translation, the argument that the elders of Israel were אלהים judges turns to vapor. Even the plural predicator is no evidence. In an article of mine published in 2010, I showed through a syntactical database search of the Hebrew Bible that there are ten passages where *elohim* or *ha-elohim* takes a plural predication.[9] After removing two of them since the speaker was a polytheistic Gentile (Jezebel), it was found that none of the remaining eight clearly pointed to a plural subject. All but one in fact required a singular subject (the God of Israel) because of other grammatical and contextual indicators. The remaining one (Gen 35:7) was ambiguous.

There is one other passage that speaks of אלהים in a context similar to that of Exod 22:8. Exodus 21:2-6 must be brought into the discussion:

> 2 When you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, and in the seventh he shall go out free, for nothing. 3 If he comes in single, he shall go out single; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. 4 If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out alone. 5 But if the slave plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,' 6 then his master shall bring him to God (האלהים),[10] and he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall be his slave forever.

[9] Michael S. Heiser, "Should אלהים (*ʾelōhîm*) with Plural Predication be Translated "Gods"? *Bible Translator* 61:3 (July 2010): 123-136. The passages are Gen 20.13; 35.7; Exod 22.8; 2 Sam 7.23; 1 Kgs 19.2; 20.10. Gen 31.53; 1 Sam 28.13; 1 Kgs 12.28; and Ps 58.12 (English, 58.11).

[10] The *Tanakh* translation adds a note here: "to the judges."

The interpretation is put forth that the master is commanded to bring the slave before the elder-judges of Israel before piercing his ear, and that these judges are called האלהים. This position appears plausible at first glance, but its coherence falters in light of the parallel passage in Deut 15.[11]

2.1.2. The gods of Psalm 82 are the Israelites at Sinai

This option has Ps 82:6 addressed to the human gathering at Sinai at the giving of the law. It appears to be the position taken by most rabbinical interpreters.[12] *Tanḥ.* B 9(13a) tells us that God spoke to the Angel of Death at the Sinai event: "When I created you, I created you for the nations of the world, but not for my sons; for these I have made gods, as it says, 'I myself have spoken: You are gods and sons of the Most High, all of you.'" Other Midrashic commentary on Exod 32:7 assert that it was at the giving of the Law that the Israelite people were declared to be gods, and that had they remained obedient to it they would not die.[13] Their disobedience shortly thereafter at the golden calf violation made them subject to death, and so Ps 82:6–7 says, "I said, You are gods ... nevertheless you shall die like men...."). In effect, this transforms the golden calf passage into a new Fall story.

This view has some obvious weaknesses. First, while it may have been the preferred interpretation of the rabbis, the idea that the Angel of Death was at Sinai is a fabrication. The text never says this.

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[11] First, האלהים could be semantically singular, referring to the God of Israel, as was the case with Exod 18 and Exod 22. The promise about the status of the slave is being made in truth before God. This is the simplest reading. However, there is evidence that the redactor-scribes responsible for the final form of the text did not interpret האלהים as singular—and also did not interpret a plurality as referring to human beings! The key is the parallel passage in Deuteronomy 15. Later redactors apparently saw האלהים as semantically *plural* since the parallel to it found in Deut 15:17 *removes* the word האלהים from the instruction. This omission is inexplicable if the term was taken as singular, referring to YHWH. Why would the God of Israel need to be removed from this text? Moreover, if האלהים had been construed as plural humans, Israel's judges, the deletion is just as puzzling. What harm would there be if the point of the passage was that Israel's judges needed to approve the status of the slave? The excision on the part of the Deuteronomist is quite understandable, though, if האלהים was intended as a semantically plural word that referred to *gods*. Seventy years ago Cyrus Gordon pointed out that the omission in Deuteronomy appears to have been theologically motivated.[11] Gordon argued that האלהים in Exod 21:6 referred to "household gods" like the *teraphim* of other passages. Bringing a slave into one's home in patriarchal culture required the consent and approval of one's ancestors—departed human dead who were אלהים as we saw much earlier was the case in 1 Sam 28:13. Under a later redaction this phrase was omitted in the wake of Israel's struggle with idolatry. Only a plural referring to multiple divine beings can coherently explain the deletion. As a result, this passage is also no support for the plural human אלהים view.

[12] Beasley-Murray, 176; Ackerman, 186.

[13] ʿAbod. Zar. 5a and *Midr.* Rab.

Second, the notion that Israelites needed protection from death by the law is also implanted into the text. The narrative very clearly has the Israelites being warned not to approach the mountain prior to the giving of the law. That action is what protects them in the story. There is no angel. Third, the Midrash Rabbah on Exod 32:7 cites the phrase "behold, I send you an angel." This apparently refers to Exodus 23:20-23, where God tells Moses he is sending an angel ahead of the camp on their journey. That happens after the law was given and had nothing to do with the bestowal of the law itself or protection from God's presence. Indeed, the angel was God's presence according to Deut 4:37. Fourth, the Midrashic reference quotes Deut 32:8-9, but that event is associated with the tower of Babel and the division of the earth into nations, not the Sinai event. While the parallel of Deut 4:19-20 has Yahweh "taking" his inheritance at Sinai, an echo of Deut 32:8-9, the latter passage clearly associates the divine act in conjunction with the Babel episode. Fifth and finally, the word "law" in John 10:34 does not refer to the law given at Sinai. While we all know that "law" is a term used in both testaments by writers to refer broadly to canonical books, it is quite evident that the gospel writer cannot have had Sinai in mind since he quotes Psalm 82. Was there really a Jewish writer who thought the psalms existed at the Sinai event (and a psalm of Asaph, no less)? In other words, if one is not prepared to argue that writer of the gospel of John thought the psalms were included in the Torah given at Sinai, this argument cannot be made coherently.

Defenders of the Israelites at Sinai interpretation offer Exod 4:21–22 as support, where Israel is referred to as God's firstborn son. Why this would mean that Israel corporately was a nation of *elohim* is not at all clear. How this view explains the anger Jesus' audience is also a mystery to me. The quotation is used by John as a follow-up to John 10:30, where Jesus says, "I and the father are one," a statement that prompts the crowd to call for his stoning. There is some point of divinity being made; hence their outrage. If Exod 4:21-22 is really a coherent defense of the "Israelites at Sinai" view, Exod 4:21-22 must suggest that all Israelites are divine so that the Jesus' detractors would make that connection. I don't see that at all. Neither do I see it in other uses of "firstborn" (Hebrew, בכור), such as Psalm 89:27, a reference to David and his dynastic line. In light of Israelite kingship ideology the language makes sense for the king, but it was never democratized. The human Davidic king was not a divine being, but was rather elevated to co-regent status with Yahweh by analogy to the dyadic structure of Israel's divine council. Exod 4:21-22 does nothing to support the mortal view of Psalm 82 and fails to explain the outrage in John 10.

2.1.3. The elohim are Humans Who Received Divine Revelation

Hanson focused in his article on the phrase "to whom the word of God came." Both he and Ackerman cite BDAG as noting that the verb ἐγένετο with πρὸς plus the accusative of direction

signifies the gift of a divine revelation throughout the Old (LXX) and New Testaments.[14] The phrase "to whom the word of God came (ἐγένετο)" is therefore most naturally to be understood as those to whom *a message* was spoken. This is the verbal pattern frequently used in the LXX prophets. Taking this as his cue, Hanson suggests that, for John, the "Word of God" in v 35 is the Logos, and so we have here a reference to Jesus' coming to humankind.

I find this argument unpersuasive for several reasons. Once again it does not explain the reaction of Jesus' audience. It could only explain the reaction if we assume that Jesus' hearers had heard John or someone else refer to Jesus as the Logos prior to this confrontation. But there is no evidence of that. The argument appears reasonable to us since we have John's whole gospel and have read John 1:1-14 before we get to John 10. We could presume that it was John's rhetorical intent to strike a relationship between John 10, John 1, and Psalm 82. I would actually agree there is such a conceptual relationship, but that it has nothing to do with having to imagine the Jewish audience in John 10 to have been thinking of Jesus as the Logos when that language was put into the Gospel of John at a much later time than the event in the life of Jesus it describes.

2.2. Emerton's Divine Beings View

Emerton is the only specialist in Israelite religion I know of who has attempted to put forth an explanation for use of Psalm 82:6 in John 10 based on its original context. I'll sketch that evidence in a moment. For now it is sufficient to note that Emerton argued that the figures addressed as *elohim* in Psalm 82:1, 6 were indeed divine beings. Since the relationship between Psalm 82 and Deut 32:8-9 (with LXX) is transparent, Emerton argued that the LXX literal rendering of *elohim* in verse 6 (Θεοί) reflected the divine being understanding of the passage. He also pointed to the Peshitta translators, who rendered *elohim* in Psa 82:6 as "angels" and as "gods" in 82:1. He noted that the Targum renders *elohim* in 82:6 as "angels" but hedges its bet by rendering that plural *elohim* in 82:1 as "judges."

Emerton took this data as indicating the survival of the pre-exilic Israelite idea that the nations other than Israel were under the authority of other gods (Deut 32:8-9 with LXX/DSS, not MT). He reasoned that the other gods or "sons of the Most High" were evil angels. Emerton's view, though, is actually a hybrid view, combining his divine beings understanding with Hanson's Logos view. He writes:

> "The charge of blasphemy was based on the assertion that Jesus, 'being a man,' made himself God. Jesus, however, does not find an Old Testament text to prove directly that men can be

[14] BDAG, 159; cited here in Ackerman, 187.

> called god. He goes back to fundamental principles and argues, more generally, that the word 'god' can, in certain circumstances be applied to beings other than God himself, to whom he committed authority. The angels can be called gods because of the divine word of commission to rule the nations . . . Jesus, however, who is the Word himself, has a far better claim on the title."[15]

Emerton's view has not gained traction among New Testament circles scholars on the grounds that the context in the Fourth Gospel makes no mention of angels. Instead John 10:33 marks a contrast God and men. The objection that John 10 doesn't mention angels in the context is a poor argument in terms of logic. Must a topic in any given verse be preceded by that topic in another verse? Is there some sort of cosmic literary requirement that a writer must bring up a topic before he wishes to bring up a topic? I would venture to guess that sort of hermeneutical requirement would shut down a lot of good scholarship we read today.

While I'm sympathetic to Emerton's view, I also find it dissatisfying. Given its hybrid status, it is ultimately weakened by the need for the Jewish audience who heard Jesus to have known about the Logos theology John would write of Jesus decades after the event. Without this link, the view has Jesus being charged with blasphemy for asserting he had been commissioned by God. Every prophet in Israel could make that claim—and it is the consistent pattern in the Old Testament that prophets have a divine encounter to certify their ministry. Prophets were not accused of blasphemy for claiming a commission. It stands to reason that while Jesus' claim of being a prophetic voice could have been rejected, it would not have merited a blasphemy charge any more than Israel's earlier prophets.

3. An Alternative Proposal

In John 10:30 the writer has Jesus startling his audience with the claim, "I and the Father are one." As I've asserted above, it does not seem to make sense that the writer would undermine this exalted status for Jesus by having him essentially say in the next breath, "I get to call myself God because all of you out there in my hearing can do it too by virtue of Psalm 82." The audience didn't see it that way, since they react with anger. To stress the point that the quotation of Psa 82:6 in verse 34 somehow defends the idea of divine equality with God, the gospel writer follows it by having Jesus say, "I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (10:39).

[15] Emerton, 332.

I propose that John understood the אלהים of Psalm 82 as divine beings and has Jesus presuming the same in the debate. The effect is that the event is described in such a way as to have Jesus asserting both his divine nature and equal heavenly authority with the Father.[16]

What first needs to be done is to come to terms with what is meant by "the word of God" and who it is that receives that word in Psalm 82:6-7:

> I said, 'You are gods (אלהים), even sons of the Most High (בני עליון), all of you; nevertheless, like humans you will die, and fall like any prince.'

The speaker ("I") in the passage is the God of Israel, the God who is standing in the council in 82:1 among the אלהים. God announces that the אלהים of the council are his sons, but because of their corruption (vv. 2-5), they will lose their immortality. For reasons already outlined, I believe that John (and so, Jesus) was referring *to this utterance itself* when he quoted the psalm, not the Jewish nation receiving the law at Sinai. To illustrate the difference in the views:

[16] The notion that John 10:33 has Jesus only claiming to be *a* god off target. A syntactical search of the Greek New Testament reveals that the construction found in John 10:33 occurs elsewhere in contexts referring specifically to God the Father. The search in the OpenText.org syntactically-tagged Greek New Testament database queries all clauses where the predicator of the clause can be any finite verb except εἰμί and where the subject complement of the same clause is the lexeme θεός with no definite article present. Any clause component can intervene between these two elements. Other than John 10:33, the following hits are yielded by the query: Acts 5:29; Gal. 4:8, 9; 1 Thess. 1:9; 4:1; 2 Thess. 1:8; Titus 3:8; Heb. 9:14.

Common Interpretation / John's strategy assumes אלהים are human	My view / John's strategy assumes אלהים are divine
The "word of God that came" = revelation from God at Sinai	The "word of God that came" = *the utterance itself* in Psalm 82:6 – *the pronouncement from God* that was uttered in the council scene
"to whom the word of God came" = the Jews at Sinai, or the Jews generally	"to whom the word of God came" = the gods (אלהים) of the divine council of 82:1b
<u>Effect</u> = The Jews are the "sons of the Most High" and אלהים -- so Jesus can call himself an אלהים as well, since he's a Jew, too. (This is the mortal view).	<u>Effects</u> = • "<u>Effect 1</u>" - Jesus reminds his detractors that there are other non-human divine beings (אלהים) in their Scriptures; they are also sons of God (the Most High) ○ This is consistent with the fact that the phrase "sons of God" is used in the Hebrew Bible only of non-human divine beings; that is also true of Ugaritic/Canaanite religion, the original context for the terminology.[17] • By linking his statements (10:30, 38) to Psalm 82, Jesus is claiming his own divinity—he can call himself the son of God based on Psalm 82, where other divine beings do the same thing. • The above is, by implication, claiming membership in the divine council. • "<u>Effect 2</u>" - John 10:30 and 10:38, however, go even further—when Jesus says that the Father is in him, and he is in the Father, and he and the Father are one, he is connecting himself to the council co-regency. In effect, he equates himself as co-regent to the lord of the council, Yahweh himself. The blasphemy charge now makes good sense.

[17] Divine "sons of God" with the same lemmas as Ugaritic descriptions of divine council members (בְּנֵי אֵלִים, בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים, or בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים) appear in other biblical texts (Gen 6:2.4; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; and Deut 32:8-9, 43 [LXX, Qumran]. Hosea 1:10, where restored Israelites are called "sons of the living God" is a different phrase and does not share the otherworldly context of the above references.

John 10:22-42:

> [22] And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter. [23] And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's porch. [24] Then came the Jews round about him, and said to him, "How long are you going to make us doubt? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." [25] Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. [26] But you believe not, because you are not of my sheep, as I said to you. [27] My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: [28] And I give to them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall anyone pluck them out of my hand. [29] My Father, who gave *them* to me, is greater than all; and no one is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. [30] **I and my Father are one**." [31] Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him. [32] Jesus answered them, "Many good works have I shown you from my Father; for which of those works do you stone me?" [33] The Jews answered him, saying, "For a good work we would not stone you; but for blasphemy; and because that **you, being a man, make yourself God**."

The quotation of Psalm 82:6 follows:

> [34] Jesus answered them, **"Is it not written in your law: 'I said, you are gods?' [35] If he [God] called them gods, to whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; [36] do you say of him whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world, 'You blaspheme!' because I said, I am the Son of God?** [37] If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. [38] But if I do, though you don't believe me, believe the works: that you may know, and **believe, that the Father *is* in me, and I in him**." [39] Therefore they sought again to take him: but he escaped out of their hand, [40] And went away again beyond Jordan into the place where John at first baptized; and there he abode. [41] And many resorted unto him, and said, John did no miracle: but all things that John spake of this man were true. [42] And many believed on him there.

Conclusion (summarize orally)

The point has been twofold:

(1) Jesus uses Psalm 82 to identify himself as belonging to the divine realm.
(2) Jesus also identifies himself with the Father, who belongs to the divine realm.

The quotation now reinforces John's exalted Christology, rather than being made to mean that Jesus is identifying with other Jews who are mere mortals.

Briefly, I view John's use of Psa. 82:6 in John 10:34 as making the point (from Jesus himself) that there are other *non-human* sons of God. By referencing Psalm 82, which is *not* about "human elohim," Jesus is in effect tweaking his opponents by claiming to be more than human. Had Jesus/John instead quoted something like Psa. 2:7, where the Israelite king was referred to as God's son, the point would have been a claim to be the Davidic king (which, of course, his Jewish opponents could not have claimed). But instead we get Psa. 82:6 to distinguish Jesus. Situated as it is between clear claims to be one with the Father, and that the Father is *in* Jesus (cp. Exod. 23:20-23, where the Name—the presence/essence of Yahweh (cp. Deut. 4:37)—is *in* the angel, who is therefore Yahweh in human form), John is both asserting Jesus is divine and distinct from other divine sons of God. In effect, Jesus is lord of the council.

This interpretation is consistent with: (1) Psalm 82 understood in its original ancient Near Eastern context; (2) other instances of "sons of God" being divine in the Hebrew Bible; and (3) John's portrayal of Jesus as God in his gospel. No other view meets these criteria.